

# Character Builder

您好學？

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

- 1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged
- 2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high
- 3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high
- 4<sup>th</sup> tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest)

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about quantitative easing

Putonghua pronunciation: **song1**

Cantonese pronunciation: **sung1**

Meanings: relax, ease, loose, slack, slacken, un-strict

鬆 (radical 髟 *biao1*, hair let down) means 放鬆 (*fang4 song1* = release-loosen = relax). 鬆緊 (*song1 jin3* = loose-tight) = degree of tightness/elasticity. 鬆脆 (*song1 cui4* = puffy-crispy) describes biscuits/chips. 鬆散 (*song1 san3* = relaxed-loose) describes loose discipline/organization.

鬆手 (*song1 shou3* = relax-hand) = relax grip. 鬆口 (*song1 kou3* = relax-mouth) = relax bite, or leak information. 輕鬆 (*qing1 song1* = light-weight-relax) describes light burden or unpressured/light-hearted feeling.

Banks' 寬鬆 (*kuan1 song1* = wide-relax = un-restrictive/liberal) lending lets investors 鬆一鬆 (*song1 yi1 son1* = relax-a-bit-relax = ease up a bit), 手頭鬆動 (*shou3 tou2 song1 dong4* = hand-head-relax-move = have spare cash on hand). But bankers cannot 鬆懈 (*song1 xie1* = relax-lazy = relax alert/attention).

by Diana Yue